

Twelve Fragments on Cypriotism

ANTONIS PASTELLOPOULOS

The present paper consists of aphorisms theoretically scrutinizing Cypriotism as a political phenomenon in the post-partitioned Republic of Cyprus. It was first published in Entropy [Εντροπία] magazine, Issue 12 (January) in Nicosia by Syspirosi Atakton (pp. 41-44).

#1

The year 1974 is marked as the traumatic event for Cyprus in the 20th century. For the society of the post-partitioned Republic of Cyprus, 1974 was experienced as a catastrophe, an event giving effect to inter-connected crises in the state, the military, the (refugee) population, the economy and the dominant Christian morality. An additional effect has been a crisis in ideology.

1974 signifies at the very same moment, the death of the dream of Enosis and the materialization of Taksim. In the face of this materialization, Enosis Greek Cypriot ethnic nationalism was replaced by a new ethnic nationalist formulation, embracing what remained of the Republic of Cyprus as the state of the Greeks of Cyprus. The romantic dream of national completion, the imagined nationalist Utopian Telos of Cypriot history was abandoned, replaced by the demand to reconstitute the past, to return to the conditions preceding the traumatic event. The policy and slogan “I do not Forget (Δεν Ξεχνώ)” became the symbolic affirmation of the new ethnic nationalism, attempting to preserve a frozen image of the Republic’s lost territory; in the collective cross-generational consciousness of society. In a parallel shift the AKEL party, in its declaration that the socialist transformation of Cypriot society was unachievable without a resolution of the Cyprus Dispute, negated the Marxist-Leninist Utopian Telos of a classless egalitarian society from the politics of the institutional left. In the dominant ideologies of the post-partitioned Republic of Cyprus, Utopia is dead; and Utopia remains dead.

The post-1974 period is characterized by the emergence of new political ideologies, attempting to formulate a logos and praxis outside of the constituted ideological parameters of Greek Cypriot politics. The appearance in the following decades of Trotskyism, Maoism, anarchism, feminism, modern liberalism, ecologism, LGBT activism and anti-militarism indicate that ethnic nationalism was never able to return to its pre-partition point of hegemony. From all these new ideologies, however, it is Cypriotism

that has had the most lasting effect, with its emergence reconstituting the very Left – Right division of Cypriot politics.

#2

Cypriotism is intrinsically bi-communal. Only a few radical positions have ever advocated a multicultural or a multi-communal understanding of Cyprus, attempting to synthesize in their political, social, historical and cultural understandings the complex heterogeneity of the contemporary and historical experience relating to the island. For the purpose of semantics, these positions could be referred to as Cypriotist, it is however more accurate to collectively refer to them as multicultural Cypro-centrism.

#3

Cypriotism is an ideological expression of the prospect of a return to a bi-communal state, which within the context of post-1974 Cyprus, refers to the formation of a bi-communal federation. Cypriotism does not advocate for the formation of a Cypriot ethnic category, nor does it negate the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot ethnic categories which are socially reproduced throughout the island; and legally entrenched within the constitution of the Republic Cyprus. It in fact **depends** on those very categories for its discourse, political expression and activism. Cypriotism attempts to negate mono-communal ideologies, by elevating both ethnic identities on an equal political footing, under the non-ethnic category of the Cypriot citizen, in the context of an envisioned bi-communal state. Cypriotism does not attempt to re-narrate the historical and contemporary Cypriot experience outside the binary of conflicting ethnic identities, but itself re-enforces that very narration, in its attempt to transcend it. The representation of Cyprus therefore remains rooted in privileging ethicized subjects as the driving force in Cypriot history and politics.

#4

Cypriotism is primarily a state-oriented ideology. In contrast to the various expressions of ethnic nationalism in the island, Cypriotism identifies Cypriots in relation to their citizenship status in a potential bi-communal state. It is therefore a classic expression of civic nationalism – the political identification of the individual is mediated through the direct identification with the state, rather than with the nation, of which the state is seen as its expression in ethnic nationalist discourses. The identity of the Cypriot, as the privileged citizen of a Cypriot state, is transformed by Cypriotism from a claimed monopoly of a single ethnic category, to the monopoly of two equal ethnic categories.

Cypriotism is therefore the ideological expression of a potentially reunified, bi-communal Cypriot state. In this respect, Cypriotism could have served as the hegemonic ideology of the constitutional order of the Republic of Cyprus. It failed however to materialize in the face of dominant ethnic nationalisms that aimed, and succeeded in destroying that very constitutional order. It is therefore unsurprising that Cypriotism emerges systematically as a political position only after the catastrophe of 1974 and not before it, being the direct result of the deterioration of the old hegemonic ideologies of Enosis and Taksim in the face of the immediate and long-run effects of the war.

#5

Cypriotism is not Cypro-centrism, although the two positions are linked and interconnected. The latter prioritizes the geographical space of Cyprus as its starting point of reference, while the former prioritizes the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities as its pivotal point of reference, producing a discourse and a politics which positions these two ethnic communities on an equal representation, negating any social, political, economic or cultural remainders outside of the categories themselves. While Cypriotism is also Cypro-centric, one can be Cypro-centric without being a Cypriotist.

#6

Cypriotism is not an ideology without any connections to our material conditions, the result of mere political propaganda or merely a naive fantasy. It expresses the hope and desire for a reunified Cyprus, perceived here as possible only through the formation of a bi-communal state, primarily in the context of a federation. It therefore has both an ideological content in relation to political, cultural and social identities in Cyprus, as well as an imagined historical Telos, a Utopia.

#7

Cypriotism is the teleological identification with the two constitutional ethnic categories of the Republic of Cyprus. On this basis it emphasizes the commonality of those two ethnic categories, focusing on cultural, social, traditional and linguistic common characteristics perceived as forming the universal essence of the (non-ethnic) Cypriot identity. The narration of history, culture, society and tradition is thus shifted from a mono-communal to a bi-communal one, attempting to trace and subsume identified common features under this perceived Cypriot identity. In this process, Cypriotism re-produces the constitutional logic of the Republic of Cyprus, where the cultural and ethnic heterogeneity of the Cypriot social fabric is systematically subsumed under the two constitutional communities, making social

heterogeneity invisible in discourses of representation. This process is made possible precisely because Cypriotism, in supporting uncritically bi-communalism, allows for the reproduction of the representation of the two constitutional communities as internally homogeneous categories, negating the multiethnic, and by extension multicultural reality internal to the constitutional categories themselves. To clarify the point: the constitutional category of the Greek Cypriot community of the Republic of Cyprus alone includes, among others, citizens with Lebanese, Egyptian, Iraqi, Syrian, Filipino, British, Kurdish, Pontic, Armenian, Maronite, Russian, Romanian and Serbian ethnic backgrounds, their ethnicity is here however, constitutionally Greek. Through the simple process of legal and linguistic subsumption, the community's external representation remains homogeneous while its actual internal heterogeneity is discursively negated.

#8

Cypriotism is not a holistic ideology and it therefore does not address directly broad social, political, or economic issues. As Cypriotism is concerned primarily with the Cyprus Dispute and its resolution, rather than with the broader socio-economic antagonisms often associated with 'modernity', it is easily compatible with multiple ideological viewpoints. One can therefore subdivide Cypriotism into multiple ideological positions: Leftist Cypriotism, which focuses on a bi-communal working class movement (rather than an internationalist, class-oriented one), (neo)liberal Cypriotism, which advocates human rights and the formation of a stable, principled bi-communal liberal civic society, feminist Cypriotism, which emphasizes the collaboration of women from the two ethnic communities against sexism and patriarchy, often connected with the hegemony of ethnic nationalism; and even an anarchist Cypriotism, advocating for bi-communal political actions and the formation of a bi-communal federation as a necessary step in the process of social autonomy and social emancipation. While a number of the above positions are ideologically contradictory and adversarial to each other, they all prioritize, organize and express their discourse and political action based on the prioritization of the two ethnic communities as the primary subjects of political, cultural, historical and social representation and agency in the island of Cyprus.

#9

Leftist Cypriotism prioritizes the working classes of the two ethnic communities, rather than the totality of the working class in the island of Cyprus. This realization is important in the context of Cyprus, where the extreme economic exploitation of the non-native proletariat is fundamental in the organization,

functionality and social reproduction of the Cypriot capitalist economy on both sides of the green line. Leftist Cypriotism silences and negates the non-native proletariat from the Cypriot political sphere in the process of advocating, organizing and emphasizing its bi-communal working class struggles.

#10

Cypriotism has acted, and will continue to act as a progressive socio-political force in the context of a divided Cyprus, assuming the continuation of the current status quo and the continuation of the political hegemony of ethnic nationalism. On a minimal level, Cypriotism entails elements of anti-racism, social and political liberalism and anti-militarism. Situated at a structurally counter-hegemonic position, Cypriotism attacks and disturbs ethnic nationalist hegemony throughout the island, with actions ranging from mere cultural events to bi-communal activism and political protests. Ideologically Cypriotism is not however an expression of humanism. It does not concern itself with the totality of the people living in the island, but strictly with the categories of the Turkish and of the Greek Cypriot communities, it is constituted on a fundament point of exclusion. This point of exclusion exposes its emancipatory limitations.

#11

In the case of a lasting bi-communal federal solution, Cypriotism is bound to become trapped within its own logic of exclusion, a logic emerging from its fetishization of bi-communalism. Identifying and expressing the two ethnic communities as the true Cypriots in its politics of representation, it produces at the same time the social Other as the exception from this perceived Cypriot commonality. It is therefore not surprising that a civic nationalism, once hegemonic, itself reproduces ideologically the binary of the cultured, superior native, contra the marginalized internal and external Other situated outside the imagined body politic.

By prioritizing the two Cypriot ethnic communities within the meta-ethnic identity of the Cypriot citizen, connected to a bi-communal Cypriot citizenship of an imagined reunified Cypriot federal state, Cypriotism neither addresses nor reconstructs the broader socio-economic hierarchies of exploitation within the island. At the point of hegemony, Cypriotism will reconstitute its Orientalized, uncivilized, shadowy and socially hidden Others in the presence of those social groups left outside of the bi-communal Cypriot identity: the religious group member, the Romani citizen, the migrant worker, the half-Cypriot, the Turkey-originated settler, the non-native citizen and the non-native refugee.

Cypriotism needs to be understood as a reactionary ideology in a possible context of it reaching lasting hegemony on any side of the green line, or in a reunified Cyprus. At a position of hegemony, it will be utilized to reproduce most of the social, political and economic inequalities and modes of exploitation existing currently in the island, in the same manner that ethnic nationalism has successfully executed in the past. Such a development would mark the shift of the Cypriot ruling class ideology from ethnic nationalism to bi-communal civic nationalism.

#12

Cypriotism is constituted as the shadow of ethnic nationalism; it is constantly formed in a dialectical relation to it. This relation reproduces the Cyprus Dispute as the dominant politics of Cypriot society, a politics of ethnic binaries, of homogenization of identities, fixated points of exclusion, subsumption of heterogeneity and the downgrading of social stratification. It reproduces the Cyprus Dispute as ideology, overshadowing broader socio-economic antagonisms integral to Cypriot society, allowing for their reproduction in the island of Cyprus as a whole. Cypriotism must be recognized as an embedded part in this process, as an integral element in the dominant politics of representation. Its abandonment as a starting point of analysis remains a necessity for the formulation of a Critique able to identify, deconstruct and address the complex interplay of power relations situated in the experience of contemporary Cyprus. Such a Critique must *'let the dead bury their dead'* – and Cypriotism certainly deserves a requiem.